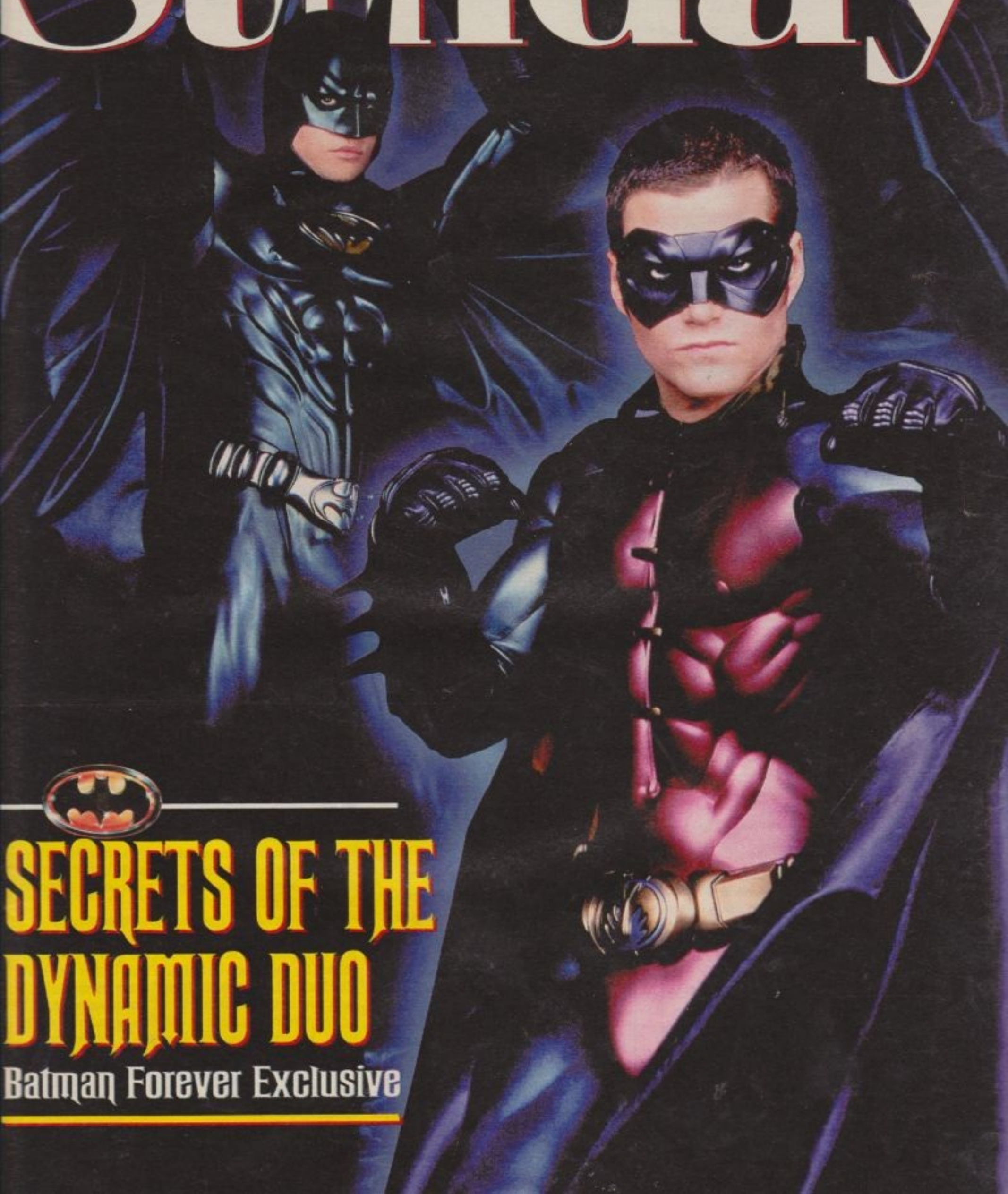


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SECRETS OF THE DYNAMIC DUO

Batman Forever Exclusive

Bat's Life

With the release of the £40million Batman Forever in less than three weeks, Leon Wagener finds out more about its stars – caped crusader Val Kilmer and Chris O'Donnell, who plays his sidekick, Robin

Val Kilmer had a privileged childhood. He lived in a mansion near

Beverly Hills once owned by Roy Rogers and he and his two brothers were showered with gifts by their rich industrialist father Eugene. But no amount of wealth could compensate when his 15-year-old brother Wesley drowned in the family pool.

Hollywood heart-throb Val, who's now 35 and stars as Batman in *Batman Forever* (released on July 14), says Wesley inspired his career. "He was a genius, with no blocks about anything. I was much more shy. Of all my family, I was blessed with the opportunity to deal with my grief through an absorption into a new life – acting. It took a lot of work but I learnt those qualities I had of my brother's were not lost."

Mark Stasinos, one of Val's closest pals, recalls how Wesley died. "Wesley suffered from epilepsy, though usually he was able to control it. But one day, he was home alone and had a massive seizure. He was either in the pool when stricken or he fell in."

"Val was devastated. They had been extremely close and Val looked up to him, despite being older at 17. Our circle of friends showed up at the funeral and Val seemed surprised, maybe even annoyed. It was as though he didn't want us to see him in that vulnerable, intimate moment."

Life at the Kilmers had never been conventional. Pal Robin Resovich says, "There was something mysterious and wonderful about the Kilmers. Val's dad never seemed to be around and his mum lived in another state. So he was free to have parties all



Above, in a school play in 1976. His school sweetheart was Mare Winningham, right, who became a leading actress herself, starring on Broadway and in movies



Young Val, second right, was modest about his good fortunes and talent



In Paris, Val loved the culture. It inspired him to be a serious student



Val met British actress Joanne Whalley on the set of 1988 film *Willow*

the time at home. Also Val's dad bought them incredible toys."

Mark recalls, "On the grounds of their house was a large warehouse which we turned into a huge maze. The walls were constantly being moved, making it harder to find your way out."

"When Wesley and Val saw the movie *The Great Race*, which featured vintage cars, they came home talking about the Hannibal Eight. Their dad thought the car would make a good present for his boys. So he hired four technicians who had worked for the film studio to build an exact replica."

"We were always working on home movies. The biggest was a spoof of *Jaws*, shot by Wesley just before he died. It starred Val as the shark hunter and most of his role was in the pool strapped to a surfboard. We poured gallons of fake blood into the pool, shot harpoons and blew things up. Val's dad had to bulldoze the pool and build a new one. Incredibly, he wasn't upset. He never mentioned it as far as I knew."

Drama was always part of his life. Says Mark, "In high school, Val starred in 27 shows. And his steady girlfriend was Mare Winningham. Today, she's a Broadway star and was in *St Elmo's Fire* and *Turner & Hooch*. A lot of people thought they'd marry, they were a golden couple. But Mare outshone Val back then. She won an award for being one of the best high school actresses in America. Toward the end of school, they had kind of a break-up, though they're friends now."

One advantage of having a rich family was foreign trips. Mark says, "Val and I travelled around Europe twice. He loved Paris – the museums, theatre and opera blew him away. It was when he stopped being wild and became a serious student."

At 17, Val became the youngest student ever at the prestigious Julliard Drama School in New York. Robin says, "Val always seemed modest about his talents and good fortune. But a

few years later, he returned for a reunion and I was shocked – he was much grander. And he kept talking about his body."

He graduated with honours and later dated Cher and Michelle Pfeiffer. His first movie, *Top Secret!* in 1984, was filmed in London. The comedy wasn't a hit but a major event happened during filming. He fell in love with actress Joanne Whalley.

"I saw a play called *The Genius* and was taken by the girl who played a physicist," says Val. "I'd wait for her outside and follow her. But I never had the nerve to talk to her."

In 1988, Joanne became Val's co-star in *Willow*. A year-long affair was followed by marriage. Now they live with daughter Mercedes, four, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. And Joanne, 33, is pregnant again.

His father died of cancer recently and Val inherited an estate worth millions. And winning the *Batman* role has put him at the top again. Says pal Robin, "Everybody always knew he was talented, good looking and rich."



In *Batman Forever*, Val plays millionaire Bruce Wayne, who secretly turns into the caped crusader

True-life dramas of the stars behind the blockbuster heroes



The film also stars, above from left, Jim Carrey, Nicole Kidman and Tommy Lee Jones (centre)



Chris O'Donnell is as much the clean-cut American kid as his movie character and alter ego Dick Grayson. Teachers at the strict Catholic boys' school he attended say that there was barely a mischievous bone in his body. And, as the baby brother in an Irish-American family of seven kids, he ruled the roost.

His 25-year-old sister Angela says, "Chris was fawned over. He got anything he wanted and we all loved him to death. If Mum was serving eggs for breakfast and he wanted pancakes, we'd all have them.

But he turned out to be the most unspoilt kid in the world."

Teachers at Loyola Academy in Chicago, Illinois, remember him as hard working and bright. One of them, Robert Austin, says, "He had the stability

not to let celebrity stuff go to his head. During his senior year in school, I took Chris and a bunch of kids on a class trip to France. He stayed with a

French family for two weeks and travelled all over the country. One of the things that moved him most was seeing the D-Day beaches and Allied graves. As he walked among endless rows of crosses, tears streamed down his face. I was very impressed by the way he behaved."

Chris, who's 25 tomorrow, started his climb to fame at the tender age of 13. He decided to chuck his £2 per hour job mowing lawns when he met a young neighbour who earned £45 an hour modelling clothes.

Schoolmate Matt Nix says, "Chris didn't tell any of us about his new after-school job. So we were stunned to see him in a TV advert one night eating candy and the next eating a McDonald's. He was modest about it and said he felt sick eating candy in lots of takes. But we gave him hell about it. He insisted he was not serious about acting, though. For a long time, being coxswain of our rowing team was more important than acting."

Says schoolpal Brian Stalzer, "Chris was only about 5ft 1in and weighed less than 7 stone. He wanted to row so we made him the coxswain who sits in front and yells the orders. He was great because he's a natural leader. We would pick him up and throw him in the lake when we won - that's the tradition."

Matt says, "Just before graduation, Chris auditioned for a role in the movie *Men Don't Leave*, starring Jessica Lange. He wasn't that excited because he didn't know who Jessica Lange was. But he went to the rehearsal and they invited him back for a second audition. He told them he couldn't make it because he had rowing practice. The casting lady was blown away. He got the part anyway and it launched his career."

His estate agent mother Julie says one of the reasons Chris agreed to the movie audition was because of her bribe. "I promised that if he tried out for the film and gave it everything

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Chris O'Donnell is Dick Grayson, who dons tights and body suit to become Batman's faithful sidekick Robin

he had, I would buy him a car. Chris did so well, he wound up buying me a car instead."

Despite critical acclaim for the role of Jessica Lange's son and Hollywood offers, Chris still planned to study marketing at university in Boston.

Says teacher Jim Marque, "Chris came to me and asked me if I thought he should become an actor. I told him he had the talent and should give it a try. But his parents had taught him the importance of education and it was hard for him to shift gears. In the end, he went to college, worked hard and made movies, too. It was a tough grind but he did a good job at both."

Taking six years to get through university rather than four, Chris continued to get good roles. His second film was *Fried Green Tomatoes At The Whistle Stop Café*, followed by the Oscar-winning *Blue Skies*, again with Jessica Lange. Despite "blowing the audition," he beat Hollywood's top hunks for a role in *Scent Of A Woman*, starring Al Pacino.

"I was so mad when I left the reading that I stormed into the lift, completely ignoring the



From the age of 13, Chris, above centre, was already starring in television commercials



Chris, above on the left, was a model pupil renowned for being hard working and bright

man standing next to me," says Chris. He was speechless when he realised that it was superstar Al Pacino. "I didn't know it was him until the lift door opened. Then it was too late to say anything. At this point, I figured I was toast because not only had I

blown the audition but I had the nerve to ignore Al Pacino."

In the end, the two became poker-playing mates, though Chris says, "Al took all my money." He could afford to lose some, however, because when Hollywood bigwigs saw early



Young Chris hanging around, above, and with *Circle Of Friends* co-star Minnie Driver, below



cuts of *Scent Of A Woman*, the £1million offers rolled in.

Next came *School Ties*, a film about anti-Semitism, the romance *Circle Of Friends*, then *The Three Musketeers* with Charlie Sheen and Kiefer Sutherland. A few months later, he won the role of Batman's sidekick Robin.

Says a studio insider, "Chris has sailed past young actors who have been around a lot longer than him. That's caused resentment. He is also a bit unpopular because he won't get falling-down drunk or do drugs. And he's loyal to his girlfriend who's a college kid."

In fact, he still lives at his parents' six-bedroom home in Chicago. "It's nice to do nothing but eat Mum's cooking, read the paper and have a routine."

And he's still down-to-earth. Says former teacher Donald Sprague, "We had a school fundraiser recently and sold a lunch date with Chris at Planet Hollywood for £4,000."

Soon to be released is his first sexy film, *Mad Love*, with Drew Barrymore. Typically, Chris frets about his mum's reaction to his steamy love scenes with Drew and says, "I'm a little uncomfortable about them." S